Mobile Telephone Tariff in Punjab

3104. SARDAR GURCHARAN SINGH TOHRA:
SHRI SUKHDEV SINGH LIBRA:

Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) the number of companies given licence to run mobile telephone services in Punjab circle;

(b) whether Government are aware that the tariff of mobile telephone services (both incoming outgoing) calls are such higher in Punjab as compared to mobile services in other parts of the country;

(c) if so, the reasons therefor; and

(d) in what manner Government propose to bring down the tariff at par with other States?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI TAPAN SIKDAR): (a) Sir, two private companies namely, M/s. Bharti Mobile Limited (earlier name M/s. J.T. Mobile Limited) and M/s. Spice Communications Limited alongwith Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) were granted licence to operate Cellular Mobile Telephone Service (CMTS) in Punjab Telecom Circle. However, the Licence of M/s. Bharti Mobile Limited was terminated on 15th July, 1999 due non-payment of licence fee dues. At present, CMTS Service is available by M/s. Spice Communications Limited; BSNL is yet to start their service.

(b) to (d) Tariffs for CMTS are specified by Telecome Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) in its Telecommunications Tariff Order (TTO), 1999. These tariffs are for Standard Tariff Package which must always be offered to the subscribers by the Service providers. The Standard Tariff Package offered by the CMTS providers is identical in all parts of the country including Pubjab Telecom Circle.

In addition to the standard package, the service providers are free to offer alternative tariff packages subject to approval of the TRAI. The subscriber is free to choose from among all tariff packages including the standard tariff package. In all the service areas there are a number of alternate tariff packages that comprise different rates

of rental and air-time charge, which the subscriber may choose depending upon his/her usage pattern. Therefore, a single element of tariff such as air-time charge or rental, and its rate in an alternative package, viewed in isolation, does not give the true picture of the total tariff rate in given service area.

Further process has been started for inducting one more private operator of CMTS in most of the Service Areas, including Punjab Telecom Circle for which Letter of Intents were issued on 14.08.2001. After the introduction of additional operator, there will be two or three private operators and one Government operator in most of the Service Areas in the country. With increased competition due to multiple operators in each Service Area, it is expected that tariff will come down further.

Disinvestment of VSNL

3105. SHRI R.S. GAVAI: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have appointed a private agency named 'Sobhagya' to develop a communication strategy and handle the disinvestment of Videsh Sanchar Nigam Ltd.;

(b) if so, the agreement made with the company;

(c) whether the employees of VSNL are on agitation against disinvestment of VSNL;

(d) if so, the views of the employees; and

(e) what is Government's reaction thereto?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI TAPAN SIKDAR): (a) and (b) Sobhagya Advertising Services, Mumbai, has been appointed in June, 2001 with a scope of work, *inter-alia*, including development of a communications strategy to address the concerns of various stakeholders arising from the disinvestment process, ensuring effective communications of the highlights of VSNL and its value drivers to potential invetors *via* substantial positive news flow with a view to building up strong investor interest for the disinvestment etc.